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SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND SHOWCASES
CAPABILITIES FOR AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During the Ambassador's October 22 visit to Fort Magsaysay, the Philippine Special Operations Command demonstrated a high degree of professionalism and training. Philippine Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Hermogenes Esperon and members of his senior staff provided a broad overview of their Special Forces capabilities, including a live fire demonstration of a hostage rescue scenario and sniper teams in action, to underscore the effectiveness of their units. Little more than a decade old, the Philippine Special Operations Command has already established itself as an integral force provider in support of the Philippine armed forces' fight against Muslim and communist terrorists. The Special Operations Command actively participates in bilateral exercises with the United States and Australia to enhance tactics, techniques, procedures, and interoperability with allied forces. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On October 22, the Ambassador and DCM visited the Philippine Special Operations Command at Fort Magsaysay, north of Manila. Accompanied by Chief of Staff General Esperon, the Ambassador was greeted by eight generals representing key positions in the Philippine military, including Lieutenant General Alexander Yano, commander of the Philippine Army, viewed by many as a leading contender to replace Esperon as chief of staff. The generals briefed the Ambassador on the significant capabilities of the various components of the Philippine Special Forces and emphasized that although the Command was established in 1996, it has distinguished itself repeatedly in conducting successful special operations in support of the Philippine Army.

¶3. (C) The Special Operations Command is comprised of three elements: the Special Forces Regiment (Airborne), the First Scout Ranger Regiment, and the Light Reaction Battalion. Each has specific roles in conducting unconventional warfare, reconnaissance, counter-terrorism, and other combat operations. Between January and October 2007, forces of the Special Operations Command had 21 engagements with Muslim terrorists and 14 with the New People's Army (NPA). The commanders told the Ambassador that the military is on pace to neutralize the NPA by 2010, in line with President Arroyo's stated priority. In addition, the commanders highlighted some of their most significant achievements against the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Jemayyah Islamiyah, including killing or apprehending eight key terrorist leaders.

¶4. (C) During the visit, the Ambassador toured Fort Magsaysay, the largest military reservation in Southeast

Asia, and met members of the U.S.-equipped and trained Light Reaction Battalion, highly-skilled troops who specialize in hostage rescue and terrorist interdiction. Following the briefing and tour, the Ambassador witnessed a live-fire demonstrations by hostage rescue and sniper teams. The impressive display highlighted the skill level and professionalism of the Philippine Special Forces and underscored the value of U.S. training and assistance.

15. (C) The visit of the Ambassador to Fort Magsaysay coincided with the annual Talon Vision and PHIBLEX exercises, in which more than 2,000 U.S. Marines conduct joint operations with Philippine troops to enhance interoperability. During her tour of the base, the commanders showed the Ambassador a runway that U.S. Marines had built during a few years earlier, commenting favorably on the excellent cooperation Phillipine forces enjoy with U.S. troops during annual joint exercises at Fort Magsaysay and other locations.

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KENNEY